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COURTESY COPY OF THE INTERNATIONAL

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON

PATENTABILITY

WITH ANNEXES CONTAINING

CLAIMS 1 - 38 TO BE SUBSTITUTED

FOR ORIGINAL CLAIMS 1 - 39

FOR EXAMINATION IN THIS CASE

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT (PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

Applicant's or agent's file reference 31.B1064.12.WO.1	FOR FURTHER ACTION See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/PEA/16)	
International application No. PCT/IT 03/00864	International filing date (<i>day/month/year</i>) 30.12.2003	Priority date (<i>day/month/year</i>) 30.12.2003
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC INV. A63B69/40		
Applicant BENETTI, Alfredo ET AL.		
<p>1. This international preliminary examination report has been prepared by this International Preliminary Examining Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.</p> <p>2. This REPORT consists of a total of 9 sheets, including this cover sheet.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, i.e. sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis for this report and/or sheets containing rectifications made before this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions under the PCT).</p> <p>These annexes consist of a total of 5 sheets.</p>		
<p>3. This report contains indications relating to the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basis of the opinion II <input type="checkbox"/> Priority III <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability IV <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of unity of invention V <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reasoned statement under Rule 66.2(a)(ii) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement VI <input type="checkbox"/> Certain documents cited VII <input type="checkbox"/> Certain defects in the international application VIII <input type="checkbox"/> Certain observations on the international application 		
Date of submission of the demand 27.07.2005	Date of completion of this report 30.03.2006	
Name and mailing address of the international preliminary examining authority: <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div> European Patent Office - P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk - Pays Bas Tel. +31 70 340 - 2040 Tx: 31 651 epo nl Fax: +31 70 340 - 3016 </div> </div>	Authorized Officer Williams, M Telephone No. +31 70 340-3521	



**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

14P20 Reg'd 70.17-70 30 JUN 2006

International application No. PCT/IT 03/00864

I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the **elements** of the international application (*Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)*):

Description, Pages

1-17 as originally filed

Claims, Numbers

1-38 filed with telefax on 10.02.2006

Drawings, Sheets

1/9-9/9 as originally filed

2. With regard to the **language**, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the language in which the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

These elements were available or furnished to this Authority in the following language: , which is:

- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of the international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).
- ☐ the language of publication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).
- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rule 55.2 and/or 55.3).

3. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international preliminary examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:

- ☐ contained in the international application in written form.
- ☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.
- ☐ The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.
- ☐ The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished.

4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:

- ☐ the description, pages:
- ☐ the claims, Nos.:
- ☐ the drawings, sheets:

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. PCT/IT 03/00864

5. ☐ This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed (Rule 70.2(c)).

(Any replacement sheet containing such amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this report.)

6. Additional observations, if necessary:

III. Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability

1. The questions whether the claimed invention appears to be novel, to involve an inventive step (to be non-obvious), or to be industrially applicable have not been examined in respect of:

☐ the entire international application,

☒ claims Nos. 15-17

because:

☐ the said international application, or the said claims Nos. relate to the following subject matter which does not require an international preliminary examination (specify):

☒ the description, claims or drawings (*indicate particular elements below*) or said claims Nos. 15-17 are so unclear that no meaningful opinion could be formed (*specify*):

see separate sheet

☐ the claims, or said claims Nos. are so inadequately supported by the description that no meaningful opinion could be formed.

☐ no international search report has been established for the said claims Nos.

2. A meaningful international preliminary examination cannot be carried out due to the failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative Instructions:

☐ the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the Standard.

☐ the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the Standard.

V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Statement

Novelty (N)	Yes: Claims	1-14,18-38
	No: Claims	
Inventive step (IS)	Yes: Claims	1-14,18-38
	No: Claims	
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes: Claims	1-14,18-38
	No: Claims	

2. Citations and explanations

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. PCT/IT 03/00864

see separate sheet

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
 EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/IT2003/000864

Re Item III

Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability

1. The subject-matter of claims 15-17 is contradictory to the subject-matter of independent claim 1, in particular in regard to the position of throttling means (37).

1.1 Independent claim 1 specifies an apparatus for launching balls which comprises, amongst other things:

"...a rapid opening device (6) for discharging on command said fluid from said tank (2) to said launch tube (3) through said exhaust duct (5); and throttling means (37) mounted in said exhaust duct (5)...".

From this wording it is understood that rapid opening device (6) controls the entry of fluid into the exhaust duct (5). This understanding is supported by page 4, lines 21-22 of the description, which discloses:

"...the quick opening device (6) comprises a quick opening main valve (9) which controls the discharge of the fluid from the tank (2) to the exhaust duct (5)...".

Correspondingly, claim 6 specifies that the main valve (9) is part of the *quick* (i.e. rapid) opening device (6).

1.2 The exhaust duct (5) is understood to correspond solely to the tubular duct whose end is in contact with the main valve (9). This is clear from page 10, lines 13-18 of the description, which discloses:

"In the specific case, in the main valve (9) the first disc obturator (12) slides within a cylindrical portion (46) of the first chamber (13), and it has an inner wall (47) oriented towards the first chamber (13), and an outer wall (48) whose central part faces the exhaust duct (5), and whose peripheral annular part instead faces the fluid tank (2). In this way, when the disc is in closed position, it bears on the exhaust duct (5) and the seal is assured by a first sealing ring (49) (made, for instance, of a resilient material such as rubber) which separates the central part from the annular part".

According to this passage, since the central part of the outer wall (48) of the first disc obturator (12) (of the main valve (9)) **faces** the exhaust duct (5), it cannot therefore be *in* said exhaust duct (5). Therefore, no part of the main valve (9) is *in* said exhaust duct (5), and so no part of the rapid (or *quick*) opening device (6) is in said exhaust duct (5).

Furthermore, exhaust duct (5) is clearly indicated in figures 2 and 4 as being the tubular duct whose end is in contact with the main valve (9).

- 1.3 Claim 15 is dependent on the combination of all of claims 1, 6, 7 and 9 (and optionally claim 8). Claim 15 specifies:

"...said throttling means (37) allow to vary the fluid passage section in the main valve (9), acting on the travel of the first obturator (12)".

This claim attempts to specify that the throttling means (37) are adapted to adjust the spacing between the first obturator (12) and the end of the exhaust duct (5) when the main valve (9) is fully open. However, for the reasons given in 1.1 and 1.2 above, the main valve (9) is not in exhaust duct (5). Therefore, the spacing between the first obturator (12) and the end of the exhaust duct (5), i.e. the restriction constituting such throttling means, is necessarily outside the exhaust duct (5). This is contradictory to the specification of claim 1, which specifies:

"...throttling means (37) mounted in said exhaust duct (5)...".

- 1.4 Claims 16 and 17, respectively, merely specify embodiments of throttling means which are consistent with claim 15, and therefore contradictory to the specification of claim 1, to the extent that they refer to embodiments in which the throttling means are outside the exhaust duct (5).

In the case of claim 17 (corresponding to figure 10), the inner part (63) of the exhaust duct (5) is adjustable axially, but the throttling means are still outside the exhaust duct (5). In this embodiment, the throttling means cannot be considered to be "mounted in the exhaust duct (5)" since the throttling means are constituted by the exhaust duct (5) itself (specifically the end of the exhaust duct (5)) in cooperation with first obturator (12). Moreover, although inner part (63) of exhaust duct (5) slides in telescopic fashion inside another part of exhaust duct (5), inner part (63) cannot be considered to be mounted in the exhaust duct (5) because in

fact it forms part of the exhaust duct (5).

Re Item V

Reasoned statement with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Reference is made to the following documents (D):

D1: US-A-4 951 644 (BON) 28 August 1990 (1990-08-28)

D2: US-A-5 647 338 (MARTIN) 15 July 1997 (1997-07-15)

2.1 Document D1 is regarded as being the closest prior art to the subject-matter of claim 1, and discloses (the references in parentheses applying to this document):

an apparatus *suitable for* launching balls for sports practice comprising: a tank (50) for housing a gaseous fluid under pressure; a launch tube (12) whose section substantially corresponds to that of a ball to be launched, said tube having an open end for launching the ball and having a seat for positioning the ball; an exhaust duct (60) of the fluid operatively connected between said tank (50) and said launch tube (12); a rapid opening device (34, 32, 80) for discharging on command said fluid from said tank (50) to said launch tube (12) through said exhaust duct (60), to cause the launching of the ball; and throttling means (90) mounted in said exhaust duct (60), said throttling means (90) being adapted to be adjusted for varying the effective section of the exhaust duct (60) (see column 2, line 12 to column 3, line 53 and fig's 1, 2).

2.2 The subject-matter of claim 1 therefore differs from this known document D1 in that:

said throttling means are adapted to be adjusted for varying the effective section of the exhaust duct such that said effective section determined by the throttling means remains the same during a whole launch.

The subject-matter of claim 1 therefore meets the requirements of Article 33(2) PCT.

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/IT2003/000864

2.3 The problem to be solved by the present invention may therefore be regarded as:

to provide an apparatus for launching balls for sports practice that is able to launch a ball, with precision, reproducibility and adjustable launch velocity (see for example description page 2, lines 19 to 21 and page 2, line 25 to page 3, line 2).

2.4 The solution to this problem proposed in claim 1 of the present application is considered as involving an inventive step (Article 33(3) PCT) for the following reasons:

- document D1 discloses an apparatus *suitable for* launching balls for sports practice, but the throttling means (90) mounted in the exhaust duct (60) are adapted to adjust the effective section of the exhaust duct (60) during a launch automatically in response to the pressure in the barrel (112). The purpose of this is to protect the object to be launched against g-force levels above a predetermined safe level (see column 3, lines 37-47 of this document). The throttle means (90) in the apparatus disclosed in document D1 is not adapted to provide adjustable launch velocity.

- document D2 discloses an apparatus for launching balls for sports practice, but the throttling means (profile of fluid control valve (21) downstream of control chamber (10)) are not adjustable.

The subject-matter of claim 1 therefore meets the requirements of Article 33(3) PCT.

2.5 Claims 2-14 and 18-38 are dependent on claim 1 and as such also meet the requirements of the PCT with respect to novelty and inventive step.

REMARKS:

- A. Claims 28 and 31 do not meet the requirements of Article 6 PCT in that the matter for which protection is sought is not clearly defined. In each case the claim attempts to define the subject-matter in terms of the result to be achieved, which merely amounts to a statement of the underlying problem, without providing the technical features necessary for achieving this result.

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/IT2003/000864

Claim 28 specifies that the apparatus comprises "means for enhancing launch precision", but this claim lacks the technical features required to achieve enhanced launch precision. Suitable features are, for example, specified in claim 29.

Claim 31 specifies that the apparatus comprises "launch noise reducing means", but this claim lacks the technical features required to reduce launch noise. Suitable features are, for example, specified in claim 32.

- B. The features of the characterising part of claim 1 are not provided with reference signs placed in parentheses (Rule 6.2(b) PCT).
- C. According to the requirements of Rule 10.2 PCT, the terminology and the signs shall be consistent throughout the application. This requirement is not met in view of the use of the expressions "rapid opening device" and "quick opening device" for the same feature (6) (see claims 1, 6, 7 and 8 and description).
- D. Neither of the two variants of the fourth embodiment (page 7, line 16 to page 8, line 1 and fig's 9 and 10) falls within the scope of independent claim 1, in that, in each variant, the throttle means (37) are not mounted in the exhaust duct (5) (see also Item III above).
- E. Contrary to the requirements of Rule 5.1(a)(ii) PCT, the relevant background art disclosed in the documents D1 and D2 is not mentioned in the description, nor are these documents identified therein.